



**State of Wisconsin**  
**Department of Public Instruction**  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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\*\*\*\*GUEST EDITORIAL\*\*\*\*

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## Celebrating ACT success with an eye toward increased rigor

*By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster*

Earlier this week, Wisconsin learned that its 2006 graduates again achieved high scores on the ACT college admissions test. Our 22.2 composite score is 1.1 points higher than the 2006 national composite score, an academic success that is a testament to the work of our students and their teachers and the support they receive from their families and communities.

As we celebrate this accomplishment, I want to challenge our educational community, business and civic leaders, and policymakers to look to the future and do more. Our technological society demands and it is our shared responsibility to provide all students with a solid academic foundation for the high-performance careers of the 21st century. I urge parents and educators to be involved in course selection so our students take the rigorous classes that will better prepare them for postsecondary studies and careers.

Wisconsin's results on the ACT are directly related to the higher percentage of state students who take a college preparatory curriculum than do students nationally. In Wisconsin, 57 percent of students who took the ACT during their high school years reported taking a core curriculum, compared to 54 percent nationally. Their scores were 2.2 to 1.5 points higher than students who didn't take the ACT-recommended core course work of four years of English and three or more years each of mathematics, science, and social studies. Most of Wisconsin's ACT-taking students already take ACT-recommended math and science credits, with 81 percent of 2006 Wisconsin graduates reporting they took three or more years of math and 77 percent taking three or more years of science.

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ACT college-readiness data and common sense tell us that our students should take more math and science courses. Preparation for college and the future requires that students pursue a rigorous course of study throughout high school. Most students take biology as high school freshmen or sophomores, and many learn about earth science in middle school. They draw on this prior knowledge when taking the ACT science test. To truly increase achievement for all students and close the achievement gap, we must ensure that academic rigor spans the PK-12 system, not just add requirements in high school.

We also must remember that not all students learn at the same pace, not all children have the same learning style, and not all young people have the same career interests. Many of our students learn a great deal of math and science in technology, agriculture, business, financial literacy, and other electives that ignite their interests or advance an already defined career goal. We must not sacrifice these opportunities, but instead, must ensure that these classes align with standards, engage students, and contribute to our efforts to close the achievement gap.

Our locally elected school boards need the flexibility to meet the needs of their communities. Already, one-third of school districts with high schools require more than two math credits; 84 require more than two years of science. Each community must take a comprehensive approach to ensure their graduation requirements have the academic rigor and require the proficiency that will help our youth succeed. We must encourage students to pursue a well-rounded education and to study the subjects that will help them reach their dreams and contribute to our state's economic prosperity.

Let us celebrate our 2006 graduates' ACT success and unite in our efforts to support academic rigor throughout our educational system.

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*Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTE:** To download a high resolution photo of the state superintendent, visit the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >.